

Regional

Dimick assesses the relationship of art, talent

Most of us have marveled at the works of famous artists, thinking that if only we had their natural gifts that we too could join their ranks. Natural talent, it is assumed, is the absolute requirement for any good artist. But not everyone is quite so sure. One who questions the necessity of raw talent is Brigham Dimick, an associate professor and area head of drawing in the department of art and design at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

"I think that the idea of talent can undermine people who have interest and I question how important talent is to become a decent artist," he said. "I think it is extremely important to be a very good artist, but the art of drawing and translating the tri-dimensional world onto the two dimensional plane can be taught."

Born in Oak Park, Ill., and reared in Allentown, Penn., Dimick said he became interested in art at a very early age. He went on to obtain his bachelor's degree in fine arts from the Tyler School of Art at Temple University and a master's of fine arts from Indiana University. Visual artists like Dimick use a variety of tools in their craft.

"The first that comes to mind is graphite, like the simple pencil," he said. "There are many different manifestations of a line, whether it be a pen and ink or a whiter silver that is scratched across a surface. One of the main tools our students begin with is charcoal because it goes on so quickly and it can be pushed back and wiped off with their hands and revised. The idea of revision is important to kind of train you, and then of course it moves into shades, which allows people to think tonally and render light. So those are like the foundations, and then we move into

water-based media."

With today's technology encroaching upon all areas of life and work, how have computers influenced the way artists are trained and express their ideas?

"I find the synergy between the hand-drawn and the digitally created so ripe with possibilities," Dimick said. "But it's really good to train the hand and form a kind of an understanding of how to compose and work through ideas by hand, even if you are principally a digital artist. It is a way of investing in a kind of a mark that is singular and decisive, as opposed to something that is easily changed and that has infinite permutations." One art form that allows the interplay between hand drawing and computer generated images is in the work of 3-D creations.

"I just love working with students who are 3-D artists," said Dimick, who also works in this format. "I start with a photograph on canvas and I purposely show the edges of the photograph, so when the viewers see the work in person they see this kind of conflation between photography and painting, and so the photograph determines the color and the perspective and the direction of the light of the invention around us. So I have conceived 95 percent of the painting as an elaborate frame for the photographs. And of course a photograph is monocular and we are binocular. Photographs happen within a fraction of a second and the fabrication of this painting takes many months." Just as it takes time to produce art, Dimick said that to really appreciate the work of an artist also requires time and study.

"I think research is great, but what I'm concerned with is if people feel like they have no right to interpret unless they

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do the research," he said. "Maybe they detach from the experience. Really an artist does not control interpretation. They simply make a rich thing to respond to. Hopefully it is rich enough and that it strikes a chord so that viewers can bring their own experiences to the situation. I prefer to ask people what they see rather than tell them what it means."

Many famous painters also did a lot of drawing in their careers – such as Da Vinci and Picasso. But, what is the real difference?

"I think of drawing as a verb," Dimick explained. "So drawing is in painting, it's in print making, it is a way of forming your visual thoughts. We can think of it as media specific with the traditional means of ink and charcoal or graphite and such, or we can think of it as a way of seeing, a way of forming this idea of active composing."

Dimick is working now on projects that explore time and space, about different events that are captured photographically and are brought together as if in one time and one place. "I am interested in that idea of kind of constructing a new narrative in making connections, and they actually cover things that are about life and death."

Aldemaro Romero is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.



Courtesy of Vigneau Dimick

Professor Brigham Dimick